

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER'S GANDHI'S VISIT TO EAST BERLIN

REF: BERLIN 6123

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI, CONCLUDED
HER OFFICIAL THREE-DAY VISIT TO EAST BERLIN THE
MORNING OF JULY 4. BY ALL ACCOUNTS, HER STAY WAS HIGHLY
SUCCESSFUL IN PROJECTING HER IMAGE AS A LEADER OF SOME
600 MILLION INDIANS, AS A WOMAN WHO HOLDS HIGH OFFICE,
AND AS A CONSIDERABLE PERSONALITY IN HER OWN RIGHT.
MRS. GANDHI MADE THE CORRECT PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS FAR
AS HER HOSTS WERE CONCERNED; STAYED AWAY FROM CONTENTIOUS
ISSUES DESPITE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPOUND AT A PRESS
CONFERENCE; AND SIGNED A " COMMUNIQUE" WITH SED PARTY
CHIEF HONECKER AS AN EARNEST OF GOOD INTENTIONS TO
DEVELOP CLOSER AND FRIENDLIER RELATION WITH THE
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GDR. END SUMMARY.

2. MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT PROVIDED THE BIGGEST PUBLICITY SPLASH IN RECENT MEMORY FOR A SINGLE PERSON. FLAGS AND BANNERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA WERE DISPLAYED THROUGHOUT EASTBERLIN, WITH SLOGANS OF WELCOME AND FRIENDSHIP AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF MRS. GANDHI OFTEN SIDE BY SIDE WITH THOSE OF ERICH HONECKER. AT THE AIRPORT, ON BOTH HER ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE, A 21 GUN SALUTE WAS FIRED FOLLOWED BY A PARADE OF A 100 MAN COMPLEMENT OF THE GDR ARMED FORCES, BEHIND A LARGE BAND, WITH THEIR HIGH KICKING AND BOOT CLANGING GOOSE STEP. APPROXIMATELY 1,000 INDIANS CHEERED HER AT THE AIRPORT- SOME MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS SUGGEST THAT A NUMBER CAME FROM THE FRG. SHE RESPONDED BY SPEAKING TO THEM AS SHE PASSED BY THEIR FORMATION. DURING THE 30 MINUTE OPEN AUTOMOBILE RIDE IN EAST BERLIN WITH SED SECRETARY GENERAL ERICH HONECKER BY HER SIDE, THOUSAND OF NEAR-BY APARTMENT DWELLERS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN CHEERED HER, THE SCHOOL CHILDREN CHEERING INDISCRIMINATELY ALL OTHER CARS IN THE CAVALCADE. GREETING THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AT THE AIRPORT, MRS. GANDHI SPOKE BRIEFLY TO THE CHIEF OF THE CORPS, NORTHERN KOREAN RI DZANG SU, SOVIET AMBASSADOR ABRASSIMOV, AND U.S. AMBASSADOR COOPER.

3. THE SCHEDULE FOR HER VISIT INCLUDED MEETINGS WITH THE PART LEADERSHIP, A LARGE DINNER AT THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC, A PRESS CONFERENCE, AN INFORMAL VISIT WITH INDIAN STUDENTS IN THE GDR, AND A VISIT TO AN EAST GERMAN MACHINE TOOL PLANT, AMONG OTHER ACTIVITIES. HER VISIT RELEGATED OTHER NEWS ITEMS, INCLUDING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTY CONFERENCE ENDING THAT DAY, TO THE BACK PAGES OF LOCAL NEWSPAPERS.

4. IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE GDR WANTED TO MAKE THE MOST OF HER PRESENCE IN BERLIN TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN LEGITIMACY AND NEW IMPORTANCE. IT ALSO APPEARS TO HAVE OFFERED THE GDR AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE STRONGER TIES WITH THE NON-ALIGNED NATIONS, WHOSE ROLE IN THE WORLD AFFAIRS WAS INITIATED BY MRS. GANDHI'S FATHER, PANDIT NEHRU, ALONG WITH TITO AND NASSER; AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO ASSOCIATE THE GDR WITH THE THIRD WORLD.

5. MRS. GANDHI'S PRIMARY HOST WAS SED PARTY CHIEF HONECKER, WHO GREETED HER AND BADE HER FAREWELL AT THE AIRPORT. THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BIG THREE OF THE GDR REGIME, SINDERMAN AND STOPH, (IN ADDITION TO HONECKER), WERE PERPETUALLY AT HER SIDE, ESPECIALLY WHEN PHOTOGRAPHS WERE BEING TAKEN. HER AIRPORT

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE ALSO BROUGHT OUT A MAJORITY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE SED POLITBURO. MRS. GANDHI USED HER DEPARTURE AS THE OCCASION TO PUBLICLY ANNOUNCE THAT SHE HAD EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO HONECKER TO PAY AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO INDIA AT AN UNSPECIFIED TIME.

6. THE " COMMUNIQUE" ISSUED FOR THE VISIT IS SHORT ON SUBSTANCE AND HEAVY ON VERBIAGE. DESPITE THE GENERAL EMPHASIS UPON AGREEMENT ON SUCH MATTERS AS GENERAL DISARMAMENT, PEACE AND SECURITY, NEVERTHELESS, INDIAN AND GDR INTERESTS STAND OUT AS SEPARATE AND DISTINCT ENTITIES. MRS. GANDHI WAS AT PAINS TO POINT OUT DURING HER STAY THAT ALTHOUGH INDIA CAN BE DESCRIBED AS A " SOCIALIST" COUNTRY, INDIAN SOCIALISM IS NOT AS FAR-RANGING AS THAT PRACTICED IN THE GDR. SHE ALSO FREQUENTLY POINTED OUT IN HER PUBLIC APPEARANCES THAT INDIA'S WAY IS NOT EVERYONE'S WAY AND, BY IMPLICATION, THAT GDR SOCIALISM IS NOT EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA EITHER. AS IT HAPPENED, MRS. GANDHI'S WORDS SEEMED SOMEHOW TO COMPLEMENT THE VOICES OF EUROPEAN DISSENT TO THE CONCEPT OF SOVIET HEGEMONY WHICH WERE HEARD IN EAST BERLIN JUST PRIOR TO HER ARRIVAL, DURING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTY CONFERENCE. THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN THE END THAT MRS. GANDHI HAD ASSERTED HER INTENTIONS TO PURSUE A RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THAT SHE WILL SEEK TO PERSIST IN THE APPEARANCE OF INDIAN NON-ALIGNMENT. IN THIS CONTEXT, SHE MADE IT CLEAR THAT INDIA EXPECTS ASSISTANCE FROM THE CAPITALISTIC WORLD AS WELL AS FROM THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES.

7. ON THE MORE SUBSTANTIVE SIDE, THE GDR AND INDIAN LEADERSHIP AGREED TO PURSUE GREATER CULTURAL EXCHANGES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNDER AN AGREEMENT CONCLUDED IN 1973 AND TO CONVENE A SECOND MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRADE AT WHICH " CONCRETE" PROPOSALS WOULD BE MADE TO INCREASE COMMERCE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THERE WAS ALSO TALK OF AN EXCHANGE OF TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PERSONNEL AND INFORMATION.

8. FOR WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS, MRS. GANDHI'S PRESS CONFERENCE MUST HAVE RANKED AS A " NON-EVENT" SINCE SHE SHIED AWAY FROM ANSWERING CONTENTIOUS QUESTIONS AND FROM CRITICIZING, EXCEPT BY IMPLICATION, OTHER COUNTRIES. WHEN ASKED ABOUT DIEGO GARCIA, FOR EXAMPLE, MRS. GANDHI MERELY STATED THAT INDIA, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE INDIAN OCEAN'S PERIPHERY, WAS AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLAND AS A " BASE FOR NUCLEAR

WEAPONS" BUT FRANKLY STATED INDIA WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO TAKE " DIRECT ACTION" IN THE MATTER. ON THE SUBJECT OF SECRETARY KISSINGER'S RECENT MEETING WITH SOUTH AFRICA'S VORSTER IN WEST GERMAN6, MRS. GANDI PLEADED LACK OF INFORMATION ALTHOUGH SHE GRATUITOUSLY DOUBTED THAT THE MEETING WOULD " BRING GREATER FREEDOM TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA." SHE DEFENDED HER GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS IN IMPRISONING MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP AT HOME AS NECESSARY TO PROTECT " DEMOCRACY".

9. IF HONECKER'S PROPOSED VISIT TO NEW DELHI MATERIALIZES, IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF HE STAYS AS FAR AWAY FROM THE SUBJECT OF INDO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AS MRS. GANDHI DID FROM EAST-WEST GERMAN MATTERS. NONE OF THE VERY NUMEROUS PHOTOS PUBLISHED IN CONNECTION WITH THE GANDHI VISIT CONNECTED HER IN ANY WAY WITH THE BERLIN WALL.
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